Drukpa

Kunley

Madcap Lama of the Himalayas

By Russ and Blyth Carpenter

Based on Translations by Keith Dowman

Beginnings

The foundations for this book were laid more than 20 years ago, when the authors decided to turn our backs on practically everything—our professions, our home, and most of our comfort zones. We moved from California to the Oregon Cascades and began a new life, centered on public service. We worked as hard on public service as we used to work in our jobs.

Ultimately our public service took two pathways: projects at the University of Oregon, and a bewildering array of enterprises in the Kingdom of Bhutan. We met wonderful people in both settings, who became long-term friends. But it was Bhutan that produced the extraordinary person. To our great surprise, he wasn't a living being —instead, he lived in the 15th century, roaming the countryside in Tibet and Bhutan, deflating egos, delivering pithy Buddhist teachings and at all moments reveling in a sense of humor that can only be described as irreverent, whacky, and side-splitting. Drukpa Kunley. Our hero, and the subject of this book.

How on earth did two middle age, straight arrow Americans end up doing public service in a tiny spot in the Himalayas, falling completely in love with a madcap lama who lived 400 years ago? Our first trip to Bhutan, in 1996, was a conventional combination of trekking and cultural touring. We went there because we wanted to experience a Buddhist culture that had never been colonized or dominated by outside forces. Practically everyone who travels to Bhutan comes home raving about this magic place, and that's what happened with us, too.

Now, after our 19th trip to Bhutan, we can look back on a history of public service that feels a bit like a whirlwind. In the space of 15 years, we have helped with a digital publishing company, an Internet cafe, a radio transceiver for remote villages, the export of silk and wool textiles, a travel company, and an English program in a monastery. Along the way, we played Bhutanese archery, made friends with the Bhutanese people, and assisted Bhutanese students at the University of Oregon. We wrote a book of essays about Bhutan (*The Blessings of Bhutan*), which was published by the University of Hawaii Press.

Many things about Bhutan will stay with us for the rest of our lives, especially our friendships and the Bhutanese sensitivity for the natural world. But it's Drukpa Kunley who has permanently altered our interior landscape. He encourages courage, independence, compassion, lack of pretension, and an irrepressible sense of humor. He reminds us that we

don't need to tolerate puffery, that it is honorable to carve our own trail, that prudery is usually just a control mechanism in disguise, and that smiles and laughter are the jewels of the human experience.

Recently we spent a month in Bhutan that was entirely devoted to Drukpa Kunley (from now on, we will from time to time call him DK). We went on a lengthy pilgrimage, traveling to 64 places that DK had visited during his stays in Bhutan. We took pictures, collected oral history from local villagers, and generally got a first-hand feeling for the vistas and people DK encountered in his time. When we got home, we combined this material with DK stories found in a number of books, some of which are fairly obscure. Most of the DK stories in this book are told in our own words, although they are all firmly anchored to our source materials. To the best of our knowledge, no one has ever published a book about DK with a comparable breadth of materials, even though DK remains the most popular folk figure in Bhutan (and, most likely, Tibet).

Drukpa Kunley's life spanned the 15th and 16th centuries. He was trained as a monk in Tibet, but left the monastic setting and became a wandering teacher, roaming through large swaths of Tibet and Bhutan. In some ways, his life followed well-established patterns. For nearly 1,000 years before DK's time, wildly eccentric souls had been riding circuit, first in India and then in Tibet. Disdainful of religious and civilian authority, turning behavioral conventions on their heads, alarming the locals, often emaciated and dirty, they taught religious principles through shock and outrage. We've never encountered phrases that completely capture them, but the words you often see are crazy saints and divine madmen.

Superficially, DK might appear to be just another crazy saint, bouncing around the Himalayas at a fairly late stage in the tradition. True, he was itinerant, raggedy, scornful of authority, and eager to rattle tradition, and thus partially typical of his divine madmen predecessors. But if that were the whole story, we would not have fallen in love with Drukpa Kunley, and neither would nearly every person in the Kingdom of Bhutan. What distinguishes DK is humor. And what humor it is.

DK's matchless funny bone is based on four things, all of roughly equal importance: eating, drinking, womanizing, and conquering demons with his Flaming Thunderbolt. The Flaming Thunderbolt was Drukpa Kunley's penis, with which he knocked out the teeth of demons, clonked ogres on their heads, and and generally whacked the bad guys. No situation was too dire for the Flaming Thunderbolt. To this day, DK's penis is exuberantly celebrated in Bhutan—on the walls of farmhouses and school buildings, in

sculpture, on the heads of walking sticks, on fence rails, and just about any other place a good-looking penis might fit.

In this book, DK is portrayed as a rascal to the nth degree. The sexual and anatomical jokes, in particular, will be unlike anything many people have ever read. They may find themselves asking, what on earth is going on here? Are these stories just an exotic, Himalayan form of pornography, or is there a more respectable mission? How could one of the world's major religions have tolerated these outlandish scenes in the 15th century, and how can it tolerate it now?

The key to understanding the Drukpa Kunley tradition is to remember that the core idea of Buddhism is to release ourselves from our attachments. We suffer unnecessarily, because we go through life preoccupied with so many things—possessions, money, power, good looks, clever children. And, of course, what we actually get is just a shadow of what we hoped for. Buddhism teaches us how to sidestep anguish by moderating those hungers.

Drukpa Kunley understood that our attachments are powerful; we don't let go easily. We only change our ways if something gets our attention and rattles us. That's where DK's genius comes to light. Over and over, we see him turning the social norms of his time on their heads. DK's madcap behavior so startles his audience that, at least briefly, they are severed from the attachments that have dogged them for a lifetime, and, at least for a moment, given the chance to reconstitute themselves, avoid suffering, and seek enlightenment. Thus, in the form of an utterly goofy form of humor, can lie the seeds of a better life.

Although this was the heart of Drukpa Kunley's teachings for his entire career, some things changed when he left Tibet and entered Bhutan. In Bhutan, much of his time was spent conquering ogres and demons, while in Tibet, DK placed greater emphasis on his scorn of authority and pomposity. We think both elements are important in the DK story. Thus, we will begin this book by sketching DK's life in Tibet, even though the main subject of this book is Bhutan.

During the Bhutan stories, you may find yourself wondering whether one should interpret demons and ogres literally, or whether they should be seen as metaphors for something else. We haven't found any hints in the stories themselves. Our instinct is that the Bhutan part of DK's life is infested by demons because Bhutan in those days was a less settled place than Tibet. 15th century life in Bhutan was risky, and it was natural for humans to imagine that the trapdoors of the natural world were the

work of supernatural malevolent beings. Buddhism itself made use of the Bhutanese fear of the bad boys—various Buddhist saints spent much of their life in Bhutan subduing the mountain deities and converting them to compliant Buddhists. So, Drukpa Kunley's preoccupation with demons in Bhutan could be seen as a reflection of a theme that was already common.

But maybe the most important thing about the demons conquered by DK is that they were the perfect foils for Kunley's madcap sense of humor. What better settings for memorable stories than confrontations with a nine-goitered monster, or an enormous female demon spanning the Long Rong Valley, with her breasts swaying in the wind and her wide-open vagina dominating the scene? No one will ever know whether the demons in the DK stories had some kind of abstract, symbolic alter ego, but there is no doubt that these creepy personages gave fire and durability to the Drukpa Kunley legacy.

Getting to know Drukpa Kunley guarantees that you will begin to wonder about the role of humor in your own tradition, whether religious or secular. Tricksters, clowns, jesters and crazy saints were traditional components of human life around the globe. But what about now? Have we lost something vital? Have the world's great traditions become so solemn and long-faced, so sure that they are right (and the other guys are wrong) that they are destroying one of the foundations of a healthy life?

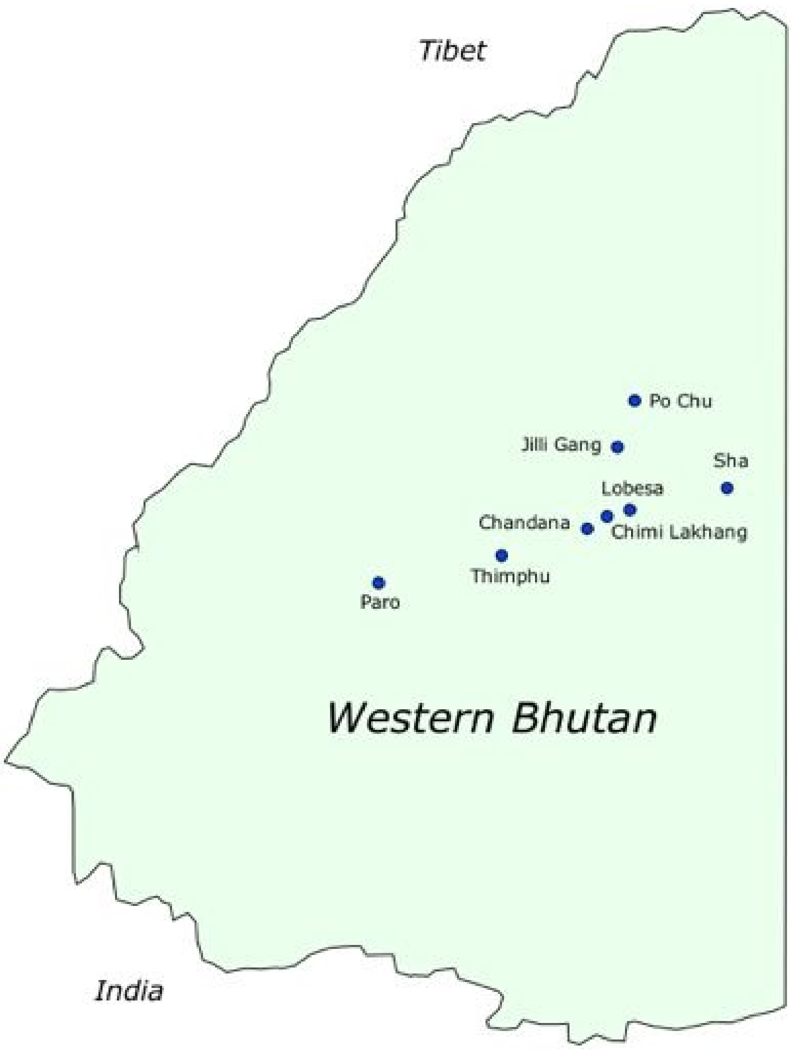
The DK stories are fresh air. They remind us that humor and enlightenment are not incompatible—in fact, humor may be the very basis of enlightenment. DK causes us to rethink a modern style of life that takes itself too seriously, and to treasure moments of laughter and smiles.

The Drukpa Kunley stories are oral tradition. Although some of them have been written down and compiled, there are also many DK stories that carry on only through the storytelling by the people of Tibet and Bhutan.

As far as we know, the first written compilation of DK stories was assembled in Tibet in the 19th Century. This was known as the *Haley Holey*; it was written in classical religious text, which is, by modern standards, very difficult to translate. Because of it inaccessibility, a prominent Bhutanese Buddhist leader decided in the 1960s to translate the *Haley Holey* into a more modern language. Unfortunately, the language he chose (known as Pelkay) was esoteric in its own right. For this reason, the 1960s document was subsequently translated into more useful languages, including English.

The translation on which this book is based was made by Keith Dowman in 1980. It has been published in a wonderful book called The *Divine Madman, The Sublime Life and Songs of Drukpa Kunley* . In this book, when we use the term Compilation, we mean Dowman's book. We thank Keith Dowman for his permission to include extensive references to his translation in our book. From now on in this book, when you encounter text in italics, you will know that we are directly quoting material from Dowman. The book does not use quotation marks, to avoid confusions with this convention.

In the next chapter we present a fairly speedy trip through Tibet, highlighting the most intriguing moments of Drukpa Kunley's wanderings through the Tibetan countryside. Then we'll cross the border between Tibet and Bhutan and more deeply explore DK's adventures with the Bhutanese people. Drukpa Kunley seems to have wandered somewhat randomly in Bhutan, resulting in a crazy quilt of journeys. To bring some clarity to his experience in Bhutan, we have reorganized the DK stories so that we concentrate on one part of the country at a time. Thus, as you reach each new chapter, you will find DK stories coming from one of eight different parts of Western Bhutan.



Tibet

Drukpa Kunley's life began in the eighth cycle of the Year of the Wood Pig (1455 AD). As a little boy, he had a mouthful of a name—Kunga Legpai Zangpo, Master of Truth. Later, it was shortened to Drukpa Kunley. Drukpa, because he became a member of the Drukpa Kagyu school of Buddhism, and Kunley, because that was the short form of his full name.

These days in Bhutan, Kunley enthusiasts sometimes believe that DK's name is a hint that DK was a kind of disguised Bhutanese from the start (because Drukpa is actually the traditional name for Bhutan). But the truth probably is that DK was named after his sect of Buddhism, rather than the glorious country of Bhutan.

According to the Compilation, by the time Kunley was three, he could read, and a few years later was an expert in meditation and yoga. He left his family to enter the monastery, where he mastered the esoteric tantras, the Drukpa doctrines in their entirety, and the complete range of teachings that a series of lamas could convey to him. Thus, DK's life up to his early 20s or so, was entirely framed by the Buddhist institution. But you could say that the rest of his life was a startling refutation of almost everything he had mastered as a young man. How could this happen?

The Compilation sheds almost no light on the question. According to the legend, all of a sudden Kunley converted to the wandering life of the crazy saint. We like to imagine that DK had experiences much like those of the Buddha himself, as Kunley begins to understand that his privileged life had nothing to do achieving greater wisdom and serving his fellow humans. We can picture the outside world sweeping DK along like a Himalayan river. He becomes overwhelmed with the thought that he should never have become infatuated with being a prodigy among his fellow monks. Instead, he should be plunging into the perilous, gritty world in which ordinary people live.

You can see evidence for this, over and over, in the DK stories themselves. As Kunley sings his famous songs, you can see a mixture of revelation and confession. Wealthy men prey on the innocent and weak; lamas preach remote, incomprehensible lessons that help no-one; parents abuse and ignore their children; monks delight in humping nuns. And all along, the truth about these things is never told. Instead, monks and citizens alike treasure their attachments, repeat their platitudes, paper over their weaknesses, and generally weave images of their lives that don't, in the slightest aspect, represent their realities. Buddhist are supposed to live simple lives, release themselves from their attachments,

and seek enlightenment. Often they do the opposite.

We know that DK decided to become a wandering, impoverished teacher, following the tradition of the crazy saints who had, for centuries, struggled against the religious establishment in Tibet and India. As a wandering eccentric, Drukpa Kunley could simply have followed in the footsteps of the divine madmen before him. Or, he could try something new. Instead of teaching by the usual methods—extreme self deprivation, wholly illogical behavior, or radical denunciation of the status quo—he could try the most rare of all religious teaching devices. Humor. We believe that Kunley had an epiphany; he could help the common people live in a wiser way, less plagued by their hungers, though the power of laughter.

Of course, it's true that DK embedded a certain amount of shock value in his humor. In fact, you could say, quite a lot. But we believe that he usually tried not to shock or rattle people without, at the same time, giving them something to smile about. Apparently, DK didn't mind that many of his students thought he was occasionally deranged. We imagine that DK generally hoped that what he left behind was an equal measure of wisdom and humor. We suspect that DK believed that the humor would be the unsinkable boat that could carry wisdom for a lifetime.

DK's wanderings in Tibet began in his home town of Ralung, while staying in his mother's house. Right away, we are introduced to a hapless character by the name of Lama Chogyal who at the time was the abbot of the Ralung Monastery. Chogyal might have been a cousin of Kunley, but the Compilation is merciless in the way it treats him. Time after time, Chogyal is placed into a DK story and then made to suffer the fate of a fall guy. He is portrayed as the consummately uptight Buddhist big shot, and DK never fails to make him look foolish.

Soon, DK left the comfortable setting of Ralung and sought out the big time, in the major city of Lhasa. DK walked into the bustling, intimidating marketplace of Lhasa and shouted these words to the crowd:

> *Listen to me, all you people. I am Drukpa Kunley of Ralung, and I have come here today, without prejudice, to help you all. Where can I find the best chung (booze) and the most beautiful women? Tell me!*

The crowd was used to pious and solemn pronouncements from their religious leaders, not to words about booze and good looking girls. They were startled, angry and suspicious.

This madman comes here for the sake of all beings and then asks where he can find women and alcohol. What kind of piety is that? He should be asking who is the greatest Lama, which is the most desirable monastery, and where is religion flourishing most strongly. But he has no such questions. Most likely he's the type of religious freak who binds girls to the Wheel of Truth rather than demons!

Then a hideously ugly man stood up and got the attention of the crowd. He delivered an indictment of Drukpa Kunley that was as crushing as anything we will hear in the coming stories.

You may try to tell us you're a man, you idiot, but you surely have no home; you may tell us you're a bird, but you have no perch; you may call yourself a deer, but you have no forest; you may call yourself a beast, but you have no lair; you may call yourself a devotee, but you have no sect; you may call yourself a monk, but you have no monastery; you may call yourself a lama, but you have no throne. You troublesome, presumptuous beggar. In the daytime you pick nits, and in the night time you get drunk and steal other men's wives to play with. You are no holy man.

This scene is the essential pattern for many of the DK stories that follow. First comes Kunley's challenge, almost always involving food, booze, women and scorn of authority. Then comes the push back from citizens and the religious authorities. From this underpinning springs a zany narrative, initially causing alarm but ultimately yielding laughter. And finally comes the teaching, made possible only because DK's clients have loosened their grip on their attachments.

Early in his career in Tibet, Drukpa Kunley settled on his accouterments (which are the easiest way to know you have encountered DK in a wall painting). He carried a bow and arrow, representing penetrating insight and skillful means. He had long hair, which was gathered and tied behind his head. Large round rings hung from his ears and his torso was covered with a vest. DK was always accompanied by his dog, whose job was to hunt and kill dualistic thinking (a more interesting mission than we generally give to dogs).

One of our favorite stories from Tibet takes place near Lhasa, at the temple of Ramoche. DK felt it was high time that he introduced himself to

a famous lama named Tsongkhapa (who was known for his fine intellect). When DK arrived at the temple, he encountered a group of monks waging a battle of metaphysical arguments. Aha, thought Kunley. A perfect opportunity to teach these solemn monks how to laugh. What are you doing, he asked innocently.

We are cleansing our spiritual perspective of doubts and disharmonies, they replied pompously. Well, said DK, I know a little about metaphysics myself. With that, he grabbed a handful of his farts and thrust it under their noses. At first, the monks were philosophical, asking which came first, the air or the smell? But then anger overtook them and they got ready to chase DK away. We will not be tormented by your humor, they yelled at Kunley.

Take it easy and don't be so prideful, said DK. You and I live differently. I'm the civilized one, while you are full of lust and pride. But, enough of this. Please announce me to Tsongkhapa.

We need to see your formal offering first, said the monks. What offering, said DK. I didn't know I needed one. I must see Tsongkhapa right now, so I'll bring an offering next time I come. Not good enough, said the monks.

Kunley was exasperated, but after some thought, came to the solution. *I have this fine pair of testicles given to me by my parents. Will they do?* This was more than the monks could bear, and they blocked the door to the temple. As DK turned around and walked away, he grumbled to himself—I will go to Samye and find an offering that will truly plague these silly monks. Amazingly, DK, through the power of his teaching, was able to lay his hands on a box of gold in Samye.

Several weeks later Drukpa Kunley returned to Ramoche Temple. Again, the monks scorned him. I have returned for an audience with Tsongkhapa, DK said. *Do you still only have your balls as an offering? jibed the monks.* No, I have a box of gold, said Kunley. And, of course, the monks escorted him into the temple with alacrity. Oh sure, thought DK. If you have gold, the doors open.

DK prostrated himself before Tsongkhapa and presented his box of gold, along with an song laced with sarcasm:

> *I bow to the lover of wealth and comfort*
>
> *May this offering of gold bring joy to his heart!*
>
> *I bow to him whose eyes turned from a poor and lowly votary*

When I visited you last year with no offering!

Of course, Tsongkhapa (who had failed to understand the scorn in DK's song) was entirely pleased with DK and his gift. In the glow of the moment, he knotted a protective thread and handed it to Kunley.

And now occurs one of those magic moments in the DK legend. Lamas in Tibet (and Bhutan) often give protective threads to lay people. The people tie the threads around their necks or wrists and wear them practically forever. But DK, of course, found an unexpected and goofy way to wear his thread.

At first, Kunley was flummoxed. He could wear the thread around his neck, but it would be uncomfortable. He didn't want to hand-carry the thread, and his raggedy clothing had no pockets. And then, inspiration struck. With a flourish, he wrapped the thread around his Flaming Thunderbolt (you will recall that this was Kunley's penis). Then he went to the market.

> *Look! Look! he shouted. If you have fifty pieces of gold you can gain audience with the Buddha Tsongkhapa himself. He may even give you one of these! And he waved his member with thread around it in the air.*

We have already mentioned that In modern Bhutan, you will see DK's Flaming Thunderbolt wherever you go, especially on the walls of country houses. In almost all cases, the thread will be there, carefully tied near the center of a fully erect penis, which is generally in a state of spirited ejaculation.

In general, DK's opponents were a wimpy lot, so compromised by their moral failings that they wilted in the face of Kunley's antics. But there was one lama in Tibet—Sakya Panchen—who dished it out almost as well as DK. We'd like to give him an honorable mention here. Actually, the Compilation suggests that DK and Sakya Panchen enjoyed the game. At times, there is nothing as stimulating as a worthy opponent.

Their relationship is captured by this exchange of poetic insults. Drukpa Kunley began:

Never knowing any physical discomfort

Hoping for Buddhahood in coloured robes,

Sending your disciples to hell,

I feel sad to set eyes upon you …

Gather around your vow violators,

Sow your seeds of disaster,

Cultivate your plants of delusion …

And fill your treasure houses with riches

In the face of this assault, Sakya Panchen actually smiled. And then counterattacked:

Here by a cave without door or pillar,

Sits Drukpa Kunley with the dirty mouth

Who babbles nonsense wherever he is …

Destroy the faith of the people you meet,

Carry your wealth on your penis head,

Offer your sacred substance to whores …

Break the hipbones of your women.

And sun-bathe wherever you wish!

The Compilation is not clear about who ultimately prevailed. Of course, if we let history be the judge, Drukpa Kunley is revered throughout the Tibetan Cultural Area, and Sakya Panchen is hardly remembered.

Now we take ourselves to the road leading to Kunley's hometown of Ralung. Here, DK encountered an old man with a scroll painting (known as a Thangkha), beautiful in every way, but lacking the finishing touches of gold trim. DK asked the old man where he was headed.

Well, said the old man, I'm on my way to Ralung. I want the abbot of the Ralung Monastery (our old friend, Lama Chogyal) to bless this thangkha. I am the artist, he said with a certain degree of pride.

May I see it?, asked DK. Of course, said the old man. Here it is, and what is your opinion?

Pretty good, said DK, but I would be happy to improve it. At that, Kunley took out his Flaming Thunderbolt and peed on the thangkha, top to bottom. The old man was speechless. *What have you done, you madman. And he began to cry.*

But DK, with complete calm, rolled up the wet thangkha and handed it back to the old man. Take this to Lama Chogyal for his blessing. So the old man sadly resumed his pilgrimage and finally reached Chogyal's monastery. He was granted an audience, and presented himself to the famous lama with a heavy heart.

To gain merit, he said, I have painted this extraordinary thangkha. I have brought it here for your blessing. But on the road I encountered a bizarre person who peed on my thangkha and ruined it. I am beside myself with shame.

And here we see Lama Chogyal in his finest moment. He removed the thangkha from its wrapping and then gave the old man a tremendous smile. You don't need my blessing, he said. This thangkha has been blessed already, by the finest method. Completely surprised and puzzled, the old man took a careful look at the ruined thangkha and saw that every place DK's pee had splattered the painting had turned to splendid gold trim.

We move on to another story from DK's time in Tibet, also centered on Lama Chogyal, this time more typically portraying him as an example of the disingenuous Buddhist hierarchy. Lama Chogyal had a terrifying dream, in which demons were trying to kill him. Although he had many reasons to dislike Drukpa Kunley, he understood that this raggedy beggar had surprising powers. So he asked DK to perform a rite of exorcism.

DK made the rather unusual decision to use all trappings of traditional Buddhist ceremony. First, he made an effigy, clothed exactly like a monastic big wig. Then he made an elaborate trap to entangle the demons in strings. He topped off his preparations with an enormous sacrificial cake.

Word got out to the village people, and they gathered around Chogyal's house, expecting quite the spectacle. DK got all dressed up for the part, wearing a sorcerer's robes and black hat, with his face painted black. He armed himself with a ritual dagger (for slaying demons) and half of a human skull for collecting demon blood.

Kunley placed the effigy on Lama Chogyal's throne. This is your ransom, he explained. When your demons have been cast out, the effigy will disappear. DK then did an elaborate dance, drawing the demons into striking range. The crowd growled with anticipation, and Lama Chogyal was terrified.

Suddenly, DK grabbed the sacrificial cake, jumped up to the throne, and smashed the cake on the effigy's head, shouting Strike! Strike! Lama Chogyal thought the point of this exercise was to protect him from demons. But listen to DK's words:

Strike … Chogyal's lust!

Strike his anger!

Strike his ignorance!

Strike his illusions!

So, we have the classic case of two ships passing in the night. Lama Chogyal imagined that DK was erecting a protective shield against demons. But Kunley had a far deeper mission in mind. One by one, he was exposing and moderating Chogyal's personal attachments and flaws, and setting him back on the road for enlightenment.

In our last scene from Tibet, Drukpa Kunley had a dream in which a women with a flaming sword demanded that he cross the border between Tibet and its southern neighbor, Bhutan. She instructed him to shoot an arrow in the early morning to the south, as a kind of announcement of his arrival. So DK woke up, got out of bed, and shot an arrow straight to the south. The arrow made a tremendous roaring sound, startling his neighbors. Kunley shouted after the arrow, fly southward for the benefit of all beings. DK then added, land at the house of a heavenly girl.



And in fact the arrow landed on the roof of Topa Tsewong’s house, near Chandana. The arrow made such a crunch that the family ran outside, believing there had been an earthquake. And wouldn't you know it. One of the persons staring up at the room was Tsewong's wife, the very heavenly girl DK mentioned in his shouted instructions to the arrow. We will meet these people later in this book when we turn our attention to DK's adventures in the region of Chandana.

Drukpa Kunley then began the arduous hike across the Himalayan passes to find his arrow. His journey turned out to be a meandering voyage across many parts of Western Bhutan before he finally arrived at Chandana. We will follow him every step of the way.

Paro

Drukpa Kunley crossed the border with Bhutan in what is now the far western part of the country (and considerably to the west of Chandana, the place where his arrow landed). The Compilation treats this trip casually, as if it were a stroll to the market. In truth, DK traversed treacherous, high-altitude country, which would stop most of us in our tracks. His first adventure in Bhutan took place at Wodo Rock—a wild, remote place that is reached by the Jomolhari trek in modern Bhutan.

Wodo Rock was plagued by the Wodo Demon, DK's first introduction to the infamous demons of Bhutan. Actually, there is an oddly appealing aspect to the Wodo Demon's personality. He had a demon girlfriend, who lived far to the south of Wodo. We don't know what she looked like, and it's hard to conjecture exactly what makes a female demon appealing. We'll trust the Wodo Demon's judgment on this.

The Wodo Demon and his Significant Other had a rendezvous place in an area that is now occupied by Paro in modern Bhutan. We can imagine that the ground shook when these two got together. A temple was built in that spot, Tshongdu Chorten, by our friend Lama Chogyal.

When DK got to Wodo Rock he met some travelers, who were shaking in their boots. Although Wodo Rock was blessed with a nice comfortable cave in which to spend the night, the travelers had heard all about the Wodo Demon. They were not sure they would survive until the next morning. Have mercy on us, they said.

Tremulously, Kunley and the travelers crept into the cave and settled in for the night. All of a sudden DK was awakened by an awful noise. It was the Wodo monster, hair flying in all directions, ready to devour the group. But first, the demon couldn't resist some word play. Mercy? he queried. Why should I grant you mercy? What do you have that might impress me?

Of course, that was the perfect lead in for Kunley. I have this! cried DK, showing the demon his Flaming Thunderbolt, which was hard as steel. At this point, the demon made a very serious mistake. He scorned the Thunderbolt.

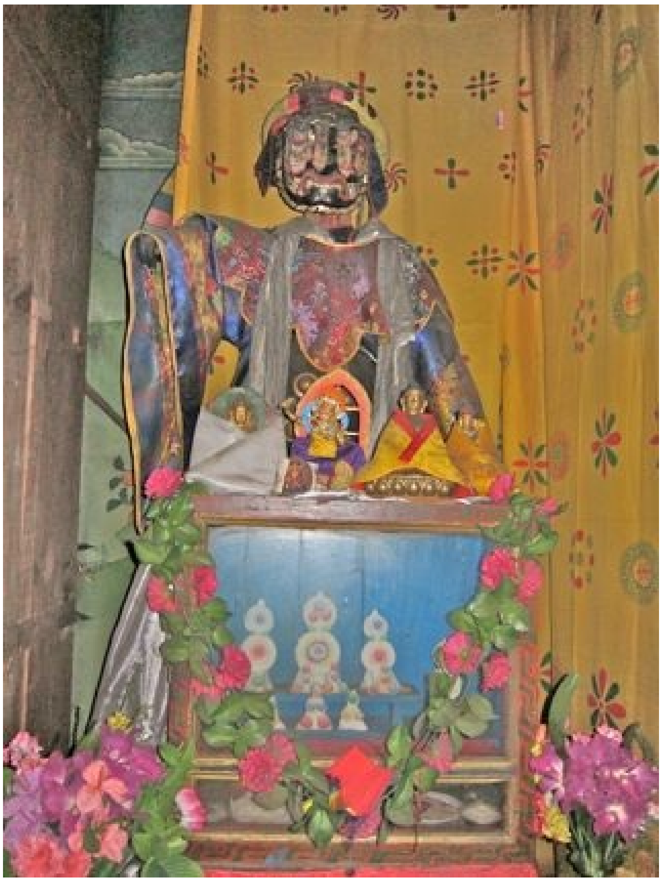
> *Aha! It has a head like an egg, trunk like fish, and a*
> *root like a pig's snout … What strange beast is this?*

I'll show you what kind of beast this is, cried DK. He made a mighty swing with the Flaming Thunderbolt, smashed the demon in the mouth, and drove all his teeth back into his head. A tremendous setback for the demon, who turned and ran away. But shortly he quietly and fearfully

returned to the cave, determined to make peace with Kunley. DK then taught the demon the principles of Buddhist practice, and the demon never tormented travelers again.



The Tshlongdu Chorten, where the Wodo Demon entertained his girlfriend



Statue of the Wodo Demon

DK continued down the mountain and reached a place called Shinkharab, where he had a close call. DK had, of course, a world-class weakness for pretty girls, and a crafty demon very nearly took advantage of Kunley's flaw.

While DK was resting under a tree, a comely girl approached him and, employing all her feminine wiles, asked Kunley where he had come from. Naturally, DK was eager to strike up an endearing dialogue, so they bantered back and forth. It was then that DK learned that she ate human flesh and covered herself with human skin.

Fortunately, DK was not entirely unprepared, because he had been warned by the locals that this region was inhabited by a female demon that ate people. Quick as a wink, he switched from his infatuated state to a formidable adversary.

> *Then, put this on! said the Lama, unrolling his foreskin and covering the girl with it. In the future may you be drenched with rain in the summer and frozen by ice in the winter.*

The demon was rendered entirely helpless.

Continuing in a downhill, roughly southward direction, Kunley reached what is now known as the Paro Valley. There, he encountered an old

woman, at least 100 years of age, who was circumambulating a chorten and saying her prayers. The story that now unfolds is one of the most disconcerting in the entire DK legend. On the surface, it looks like murder. You can interpret the story in a more benign way, but you may need to work at it.

The story begins innocently enough. What are you up to? asks Kunley. I'm praying for the blessing of Drukpa Kunley, said the old lady. This must have been a sweet moment for DK, because he had only been in Bhutan a short time and was pleased that his reputation preceded him. He said, if Drukpa Kunley appeared before you, do you think you could recognize him? The old woman replied, I've never seen Drukpa Kunley, but I've heard many wonderful things about him and I've developed a deep admiration for him.

Ah, this was turning out to be the perfect game. DK egged her on. If he were standing in front of you now, what would you do?

I'm old, and my body is a disgrace, she said. But I have food and booze in my house, and I would offer all of it to the Lama. However, I'm afraid I will never meet him in person.

At this point DK had two thirds of what he perpetually looked for (food and booze), lacking only a voluptuous young woman. So he decided to go for it. I am Drukpa Kunley himself, he said.

She was thunderstruck. She led DK to her house, where she produced a stupendous amount of booze. And then it got better. The old woman asked for, and received, Kunley's permission to invite a whole passel of old ladies to join the party. Each of them arrived carrying her own jug of chung. Considering that Drukpa Kunley wouldn't normally seek out the company of withered old souls, this was too good to be true.

DK was a talented and seasoned drinker, but this cornucopia was too much for even his capability. He reached a state of definite tipsiness, and then couldn't resist going back to his bantering with the old woman. Just how devoted are you to me? he asked. There is no limit, she said. I would give my life for you.

And now comes the hard part of the story. DK took up his bow and shot the woman right through the chest. The other women in the room were shocked. Murder, they screeched, and ran out of house as fast as their ancient legs could take them.

> *Later a crowd gathered, stunned and astonished.*
> *Someone began to swear at him. You miserable*

savage! You murderer! Why did you kill this harmless old lady! Others wept and wailed.

His is my Lama, and I have complete trust in him, whispered the dying woman from the floor. He is my best friend. Do not treat him like an enemy. And so saying, she expired.

So far, there are two ways to look at the story. One is to agree with the villagers: DK murdered the old lady in a drunken state. The other is to accept the explanation in the Compilation—before he shot the arrow, DK realized that the woman was fated to die that night anyway. Subsequent events suggest that the second point of view might be the right one.

Kunley carried the old lady's corpse to a storeroom. He locked the door and told the village people to keep the door locked for seven days, when he would return. But after six days the old woman's son returned to the house and heard the whole gruesome story from the neighbors.

Ah! these wretched Tibetans! the son raged. They come here demanding our hospitality, murder their benefactors, and calmly lock up their victims' corpses to rot.

The son broke open the door and was astonished to find his mother's body transformed to rainbow light (a sign that she had gone to a better place). This was enough to convince him that DK, in his entirely unconventional and ostensibly horrifying way, had actually conferred a great blessing on his mother.



All that’s left of the old woman’s house, in Paro Valley

Shortly after murdering the old woman, Drukpa Kunley had another macabre adventure. Kunley was wandering down the trail toward the Indian plains when he passed a house full of people digging into a funeral feast. A woman named Akyi had died.

The crowd invited DK to join then. The booze was flowing freely, which is all that was needed to entice Kunley. When DK and everyone else had become thoroughly drunk, several men sprang their trap. You are a monk, right? As you can see, we're in no condition to carry the corpse to the cremation ground. We want you to do it.

DK thought this was a terrible idea, but the men were persistent. Finally, Kunley gave up. Oh, alright. Where is the cremation ground? The men pointed to a place high on the side of the valley. Bring me a stick! said DK. To the astonishment of the crowd, DK picked up his stick and began to beat the corpse, chanting:

Don't sleep old woman. Get up! Get up!

Arise from this mess of misery!

You came into this world without purpose

And you are leaving it the way you came!

You drop your body in front of your sons

But still you have no pall-bearer!

Without your precious clothes that hid your shame

Nauseating fluids dribble out of you!

Don't lie there, old woman! Walk on!

Walk down the path of release!

In a way, this grim story has a pleasant ending. DK's chant animated Akyi. She rose from the ground and began the arduous hike to the cremation ground, with Kunley following her. When they got there, Akyi folded her hands and thanked DK for his intervention. She lay peacefully on the ground and awaited cremation. DK turned to her relatives and said, she has gained release from suffering. Now commit her to the fire.



The hill with the cremation ground in Paro Valley

While he was in Paro, DK had time for several small scale, but locally famous, accomplishments. During his wanderings, DK came upon a flour mill. We imagine that the family owning the mill had heard about his mysterious powers, and they rushed up to him. Lama, please! Bless our mill, which we fear we have built too close to the river. DK was in an agreeable frame of mind that day, and without even seeking the usual allotment of booze and women, gave his blessing. Centuries have passed since then. The river has raged during every rainy season, but, astonishingly, the mill has never been washed away. Instead, it has just slowly dissolved into the earth.



Remnant of the flour mill

In another case, Drukpa Kunley built a chorten, now known as the Juitsa Chorten. But this was not your ordinary pile of stones. Instead, according to the DK oral tradition, this was Kunley's ten millionth chorten. The other 9,999,999 chortens were built over a period of years, primarily in Tibet. Bhutan is honored to have the last of 10 million.



Kunley's ten millionth chorten, near Juitsa Village

Thimphu

We now move from the Paro Valley to the Thimphu region of Bhutan. And starting at this point, we no longer follow Drukpa Kunley's literal footsteps. That's because the Compilation sketches out a bewildering pattern of journeys, criss-crossing Western Bhutan in every direction. Rather than staggering behind DK in this manner, we will dwell in the various parts of Western Bhutan one at a time, telling the various DK stories that happened in each place.

The story coming up, dealing with the Demon of Gomsarkha, is one of our all-time favorites. It has everything: a multitude of scary monsters, inventive solutions by DK, earthly language, appealing victims saved at the last minute, and on-going resonance in modern Bhutan.

We begin with the setting. To the west of modern Thimphu there is a major valley, running from the top of the mountain down to the river. The Demon of Gomsarkha lived in the high altitude part of the valley. About half way down was a relatively level place, now occupied by a little temple called Dago Gompa. At the bottom of the valley, where it intersects the river, lived a formidable female water demon, whose name we don't know. It turns out that the Wodo Demon wasn't the only monster with a long-distance girlfriend.



Looking up the valley, toward the demon's lair

Before Kunley arrived, the Gomsarkha Demon had been just about as bad as monsters get. Night after night, he had raided the houses on the

terraces above the river, murdering and eating the people until only one woman was left. From time to time, he paid conjugal visits to his friend the river demon, but his chief occupation was slaughtering human beings.

DK had heard all about the Demon and crafted a multi-part, idiosyncratic plan to subdue him. Step one was quite exotic, and apparently was designed to rattle and confuse the Demon and his buddies. DK went to the place where we now find Dago Gompa. He lay on the ground, put his bow and arrow under his head, smeared himself with tsampa, and did everything he could to imitate a dead body. However, one little thing gave him away. His Flaming Thunderbolt stuck straight into the air. Before long, the Gomsarkha Demon found him.

The Demon called in his various nasty friends.

> *Some of them thought the body was dead, and others thought it was still living. We had better not eat it if we don't know what is is, said the Phuya Fiend. The body is warm, so it cannot be dead; it isn't breathing, so it is not alive; there is tsampa in that pot, so it can't have died of starvation; its belly is empty, so it couldn't have died of over-eating; there are weapons under its head, so it's unlikely it died of fear; its penis is still erect, so it must have been alive recently; it has worms in its anus, so it couldn't have died today. Whatever it is, it looks unhealthy for us. We should leave it alone.*



After the Bad Boys left, Kunley went straight to the old lady's house. She poured out stories of woe.

> *Once I was wealthy, she told him, but since no Buddha or adapt has ever set foot in this poor outlandish valley, the demons have run amuck and devoured both men and cattle. I myself do not expect to live through this coming night. You are a holy man and need not stay here. Go away while you can or your will be eaten alive.*

DK managed to find a little booze, and did what he always did before combat. Later that night, there was a pounding on the door. The old lady was terrified, but found a hole in the door that was just the right size for DK's Flaming Thunderbolt. Kunley rammed his faithful ally through the

door, catching the Gomsarkha Demon right in the mouth and knocking out eight teeth.

The demon screamed and ran down to the river. Then he did the most unexpected thing, for a demon—he sought comfort from a nun, who lived in a nearby cave. A strange thing hit me in the mouth, said the Demon. I was at the old lady's house. There was a peculiar man, who hit me with a piece of flaming iron.

> *You have been hit by a magical device, the nun told him. That kind of wound never heals. If you doubt me look at this. She raised her skirt and opened her legs. This wound was caused by the same weapon. There is no way to heal it.*
>
> *The demon put his finger to it and raised it to his nose. Akha! kha! This wound has gone putrid, and I suppose mine will go the same way, he moaned. What should I do?*
>
> *Listen to me and I will tell you, the nun told him. Go back to the man who hit you. He will still be there. His name is Drukpa Kunley. Offer him your life, and now never to harm living creatures again. Then perhaps you may be cured.*

The demon followed instructions. He returned to the old lady's house and offered himself to DK. Then DK did one of the more amusing things in the whole DK legend. He placed his Flaming Thunderbolt upon the Demon's head and solemnly ordained him as a layman, with the name of Ox-Devil.



Dago Gompa

As you will soon see, the demons of Bhutan were experts at shape-shifting. Snakes, fish, beautiful women—you name it, they could do it. We have two brief but satisfying snake stories from the Thimphu region.

During one of his interminable wanderings, Kunley found himself at Yoselpang (near the modern city of Thimphu). Suddenly, a female demon attacked! To make herself even more formidable, she shape-shifted into a snake. But what would have terrified the rest of us was laughably simple for DK. He whacked her with his Flaming Thunderbolt and then stamped her into the ground with his feet. End of demon.



Body of snake, with DK’s footprint

Now we move to a magical valley in the Thimphu region called Ney Phu. In modern times, this is a place of refuge, but in the 15th century, the valley was haunted by a very large and vicious demon. The villagers were compelled to move up and down the valley on a single path, giving the demon the perfect opportunity to ambush and murder them.

Word of the demon had reached Kunley. Never one to avoid a confrontation with monsters, DK hustled up the valley and bushwhacked the ambusher. As you know, DK’s weapon of choice was the Flaming Thunderbolt. But in this case, he used a knife. The demon had turned himself into a snake, to no avail. In three tremendous strokes, Kunley cut the snake into three pieces, throwing one into the lower part of the valley, one into the upper valley, and saving the middle piece for the center of the valley. All three pieces of the snake can be seen in modern times, complete with vivid slash marks from DK’s knife.



Fragment of the Ney Phu snake

The more you learn about Kunley's time in Bhutan, the more you will appreciate his girlfriends. This strange, raggedy man was truly gifted at attracting girls who were both sexy and meritorious. One of our favorites is Zangmo Chodzom, whose weathered, old house can still be seen in modern Thimphu.



Zangmo Chodzom's house

DK encountered Zangmo Chodzom while she was fetching water. In his usual style, he asked if she had booze, and, if so, whether he could spend the night with her. Then he popped a bold question. Are you a virgin he asked.

Well, almost, she said. A year ago, someone put his penis inside me, but I didn't feel it. I don't think that counts.

DK was harsh with this otherwise innocent girl. He scorned her, concluding that he wasn't really interested in leftovers. Then Chodzom sang him one of the sweetest songs in the Drukpa Kunley legend.

> *O Naljorpa, do not be angry!*
>
> *Please listen to this song I sing! …*
>
> *The garden flower below*
>
> *Never knows when the frost is coming*
>
> *Until it begins to wither and die.*
>
> *But always it blooms the next year.*
>
> *This self-willed girl*
>
> *Had no desire for men like Kholkho,*
>
> *Yet she was quite powerless to resist him.*
>
> *But now surely the taint has gone.*
>
> *Naljorpa, you take the good with the bad,*
>
> *Please accept this gift of my body.*

DK relented. He eagerly began making love with Chodzom. At that moment, apparent disaster struck. A child wandered in. He ran out and alerted his parents, who also entered the room. And then a crowd gathered. All along, Kunley continued his love making. Chodzom tried to make him stop.

> *I don't care how many people or demons watch, he said. I'll not be interrupted.*
>
> *Look at that shameless couple! people said.*
>
> *I'm not humping my mother! Kunley told them. Why be shocked? If you don't know how to do it, now's the time to learn. And he continued to the end.*

This story ends with one of those startling transformations into

enlightenment that happens over and over in the DK stories.

> *Chodzom was so ashamed that her former guilt was washed away, and she become one of the lucky ones.*



Now we move to a place fairly close to Chodzom's house, a temple called Changangkha (which dominates a hill overlooking modern Thimphu). The story features a character called Lama Paljor, who lived at Changangkha and must have loved female companionship almost as much as Kunley. He had assembled a nice, little harem of four woman and had just kidnapped a fifth. DK arrived at Changangkha at the same time as the victim's family arrived, with swords at the ready, itching to skewer Paljor.



Changangkha

DK then launched into a lengthy tale set in ancient India, which we find fairly tedious. But the story works, and Lama Paljor ultimately apologized and released the girl. The most interesting part of this episode is this song, in which DK tried to prove to Paljor that no girl is perfect, and certainly not worth fighting over.

Mistress Byaldzom of Khyung Sekha,

Your beautiful lotus is not enough—

What about your skill in the pelvic thrust?

Lady Adzom of Gommto,

Your attractive body is not enough—

What about skill and style in bed?

Paldzom Buti of Nyamo,

Your skill in milking is not enough—

What about your kissing and foreplay?…

Lama Paljor of Gang Kha,

You could fulfill a desire for five score girls—

Why quarrel over one?

Kunley's attitude toward women in this song might seem a bit utilitarian, but, in fact, DK generally held women in high esteem. We have already mentioned how his favorite girlfriends were impressive creatures. Here is

another one: Namkha Dronma. You will learn more about her when we visit Lobesa. For now, it's enough to know that DK fought one of the monumental battles of his life while he was in her neighborhood, confronting the infamous Long Rong Monster. After finally subduing this terrifying demon, DK returned to the Thimphu region, and Namkha Dronma followed him.

Ultimately, Kunley and Namkha Dronma ended up at a place called Tseluna Ney. In modern Bhutan, this is a stunningly beautiful spot, and we imagine it was the same 400 years ago. DK then did something that might strike you as harsh, but was actually an act of great love. He sealed Namkha Dronma into a cave, where she lived, meditating, for three years. This was not an ordinary cave. Instead, it had a triangular shape, just like the shape of the ritual dagger used in Buddhist ceremonies. And three years was not accidental. Three is a special number in Tibetan Buddhist practice—for example, the classic retreat lasts three years, three months, and three days.

In Namkha Dronma's elevated state, three years seemed like three days. At the end of the third year Kunley returned to the cave, just as she was achieving the rainbow body, which is a Tibetan Buddhist phrase for enlightenment. Thus, this story has the happiest of all endings.



Namkha Dronma's cave at Tseluna Ney

Before we leave the Thimphu region, we'll mention the famous Tango monastery, near the modern city of Thimphu. Drukpa Kunley visited Tango during his wanderings and announced that from this monastery, DK's

descendants would spread Tibetan Buddhism throughout Bhutan. And that is exactly what happened. Starting with DK's grandson, a string of Kunley's descendants have based themselves at Tango, which itself became one of the most important teaching centers of Buddhism in the country. A descendant of DK is studying at Tango even as we write this book.

Inside Tango monastery you will find a statue of the Buddha that is very special for those of us who are Kunley-philes. The statue contains four artifacts from DK's travels in Bhutan, two of which you have already encountered: the arrow DK shot from Tibet, and the thanka covered with Drukpa Kunley's golden pee.



Tango Monastery

Chandana

To the east of the Thimphu district we encounter the village of Chandana—in some ways, the very heart of the Drukpa Kunley legend. When DK shot his arrow from Tibet, it landed on Topa Tsewong's house in Chandana. In modern Bhutan, this house is still in great shape.



Tsewong's house in Chandana

When Drukpa Kunley finally reached the place his arrow landed, a scene unfolded that seems, at first glance, so goofy that it is actually charming. DK, the master of the unexpected, decided that the first thing he need to do in this auspicious place was to pee against the wall of the house. The moment he started, some of the local children caught him in the act. *What an enormous cock and balls he's got* , they shouted.



Utterly unruffled by the commotion (as usual), DK responded with this song.

In the blue cuckoo summertime your cock is long and your balls hang low;

In the purple stag wintertime the head of your penis grows long.

Throughout the year it's a long hungry beast.

Having disposed of the issue in this authoritative manner, DK entered the house and asked for his arrow. Tsewong, being an agreeable soul, handed it over. At that moment, Kunley noticed Tsewong's wife, Palzang Buti. DK was smitten.

The arrow has certainly not gone astray

Since it has led me to this voluptuous goddess.

Tsewong, mine host, please leave us

I must lay with this lady this instant.

Tsewong was enraged. He drew his sword, and chanted these words.

I offer you lodging and you steal my wife

Without barely a courteous word of greeting;

Without even resting you try to seduce her!

I have never seen nor heard of such behavior!

You may act like that in Tibet

But we southern folk have no such custom!

We'll admit this now. Tsewong makes an excellent case. As Tsewong charges with his sword swinging, in our heart of hearts we could find ourselves hoping that he might make at least a little dent in DK, just to keep Kunley in proportion.

Of course, we are forgetting DK's higher purpose. Enlightenment is not won easily. All of us, including Tsewong, must make wrenching interior changes before we can let go of our attachments and move toward a higher plane. Peeing on the wall, and jumping on Tsewong's wife, were Drukpa Kunley's tactics to rattle his clients into a fresh start.

Ultimately, things settled down in the household. Tsewong realized that Kunley was actually a gifted spiritual teacher. He amiably shared both his house and his wife with DK, and it is even thought that Kunley produced a son at Chandana.

A while later, while still enjoying his life at Tsewong's house, Drukpa Kunley decided he should subdue the Lungdram demon, which lived at the head of the valley. While he was helping an old man cut peat, the demon assaulted DK. Kunley hit him in the mouth with the Flaming Thunderbolt and chased him down the valley, cutting off the demon's knees along the way. That place is now occupied by a large boulder marked by mani symbols carved by DK.

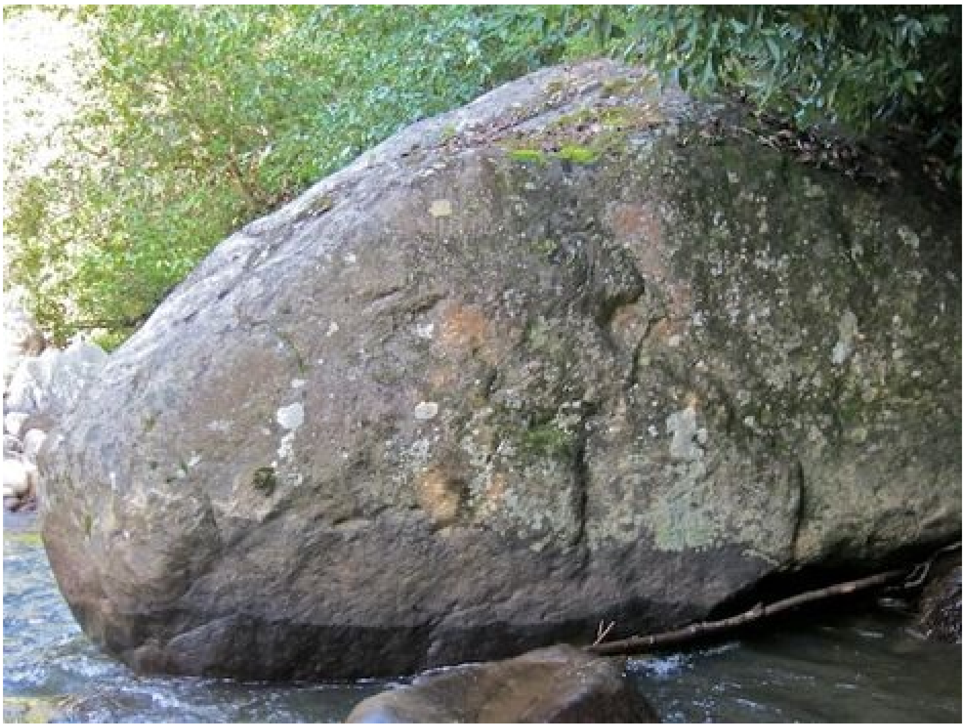


The mani rock, where DK cut off the demon's knees

Ultimately, Kunley chased the Lung chased the demon into a huge boulder. *Until the end of the world, don't come out! Kunley ordered, and he sealed the rock with the blood of his nose.*



Kunley must have been feeling feisty that day, because he also subdued Lungdram's sibling, converting him into a big rock which you can see in modern Bhutan next to a stream. All in all, a good day's work.



The Lungdram demon's sibling

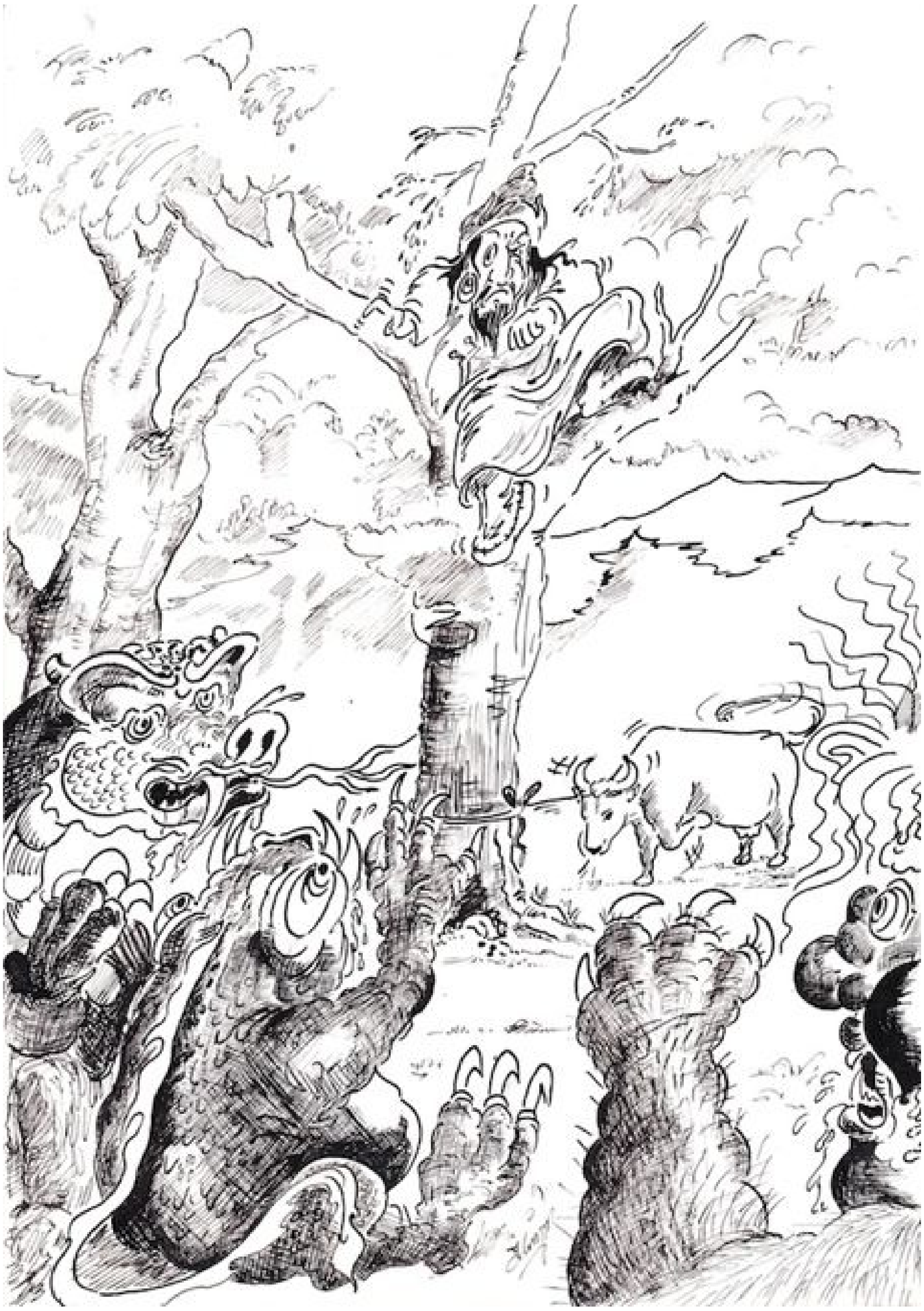
Chimi Lhakhang

We now move to the east of Chandana, to Chimi Lhakhang, the only temple in Bhutan that is dedicated to Drukpa Kunley. This place is popularly known as the fertility temple, and has world-wide notoriety. Women (and couples) come to Chimi Lhakhang incessantly, getting fertility blessings from the presiding lama. In fact, the authors' son and daughter-in-law made a pilgrimage here. It must have worked, because they now have two children, one of whom has a Bhutanese name given by the lama. We are not sure how often our grandson will identify himself in America as Kunley Wangchuk, but he has it in case he needs it.

There are two intriguing stories associated with Chimi Lhakhang. The first actually begins high in the mountains to the west. As you might suspect, a demoness lived in this place, terrifying the locals. DK climbed to this spot, intending to subdue the demoness. He encountered a young man who was herding a cow and shaking in his boots. DK asked what troubled him. *After nightfall, the demoness will carry us off,* said the boy.

Kunley offered to take care of the cow and sent the boy home. DK tied the cow to a tree, and climbed high in the branches, waiting for the demoness to show up. Sure enough, she arrived. The demoness noticed the cow and prepared herself for dinner. First, being a sociable kind of monster, she called up two of her demoness buddies to share the feast.

Then the three of them saw DK in the tree. *Come down and play with us*, they said. No way, you evil creatures, replied Kunley.



The demonesses lost their temper, kicking down the tree. That was a big mistake. DK took hold of his Flaming Thunderbolt and, for the first time in our series of stories, this formidable instrument lived up to its literal name. Fire shot forth from the tip, enveloping the two guest demonesses. However, they then pulled off a spectacular form of shape-shifting, causing themselves to merge into the host demoness. She then shape-shifted herself, turning into a red dog. But all of these acrobatics proved useless. DK caught the dog by the ear and buried it. Later, he built a chorten on this spot.



Dog Chorten at Chimi Lhakhang

On to a story about an old man, Apa Gaypo Tenzin. On the surface, Apa Gaypo's life looked pretty good. He was in fine health, all his sons were living independently, and all but one of his daughters had married and were living with their husbands' families. But there was one big problem. Apa Gaypo was completely bored.

Apa learned that Drukpa Kunley was in the neighborhood and sought him out. Please help me, he said. I am bored and need your teachings to prepare me for death.

I can teach you a refuge prayer, said DK. I want you to recite this prayer whenever I enter your mind. Done, said Apa.

> *I take refuge in an old man's chastened penis, withered*
>
> *at the root, fallen like a dead tree;*
>
> *I take refuge in an old woman's flaccid vagina, collapsed,*
>
> *impenetrable, and sponge-like;*
>
> *I take refuge in the virile young tiger's Thunderbolt,*
>
> *rising proudly, indifferent to death;*
>
> *I take refuge in the maiden's Lotus, filling her with*

rolling

bliss waves, releasing her from shame and inhibition.

Of course, Apa Gaypo was delighted with his new prayer. But, there was more.

The branches of the Great Eastern Tree grow and grow,

But the foliage's spread depends on the tree roots' extent.

Drukpa Kunley's penis head may stick, stick in a small vagina,

But tightness depends upon the size of the penis.

Apa Gaypo's urge to gain Buddhahood is strong, so strong,

But the scale of his achievements depends upon the strength of his devotion.

Apa returned to his home. And here is where we begin to see the true Apa Gaypo. This man was plucky. No kind of scorn or social pressure could alter his affection for Drukpa Kunley or his commitment to the refuge prayer.

First, his daughter asked him if he had met with the lama and received instruction. Yes indeed, said Apa. The lama gave me a refuge prayer, which I have learned by heart. His daughter was scornful. You are ignorant and poorly educated, she said, as she prepared herself to listen to a pleasant, but trivial chant from her father.

Apa launched right in. *I take refuge in an old man's chastened penis* , he said, and then continued exactly with the verses Kunley had taught him. His daughter, speechless and mortified, ran away to find her mother.

You are insane, screeched the wife. You must have completely misunderstood the lama. And even if you understood him correctly, don't ever say these things in front of the children. But Apa stood his ground. The lama told me to say this prayer when I thought of him, said Apa, and that is exactly what I will do.



Later in the day the family gathered for their evening meal. Our stalwart Apa repeated the prayer in front of them, and they grumbled and whispered among themselves: the old man has lost his mind. In a display of prudish righteousness, they took their bowls and left the room.

Poor Apa Gaypo was then banished by his own family. They built a room in the upstairs loft and forced him to live in this cold and drafty place. Day after day, they could hear the sounds of prayer from the loft. And then it grew quiet.

In spite of her contempt for her husband, the wife got worried. She sent the daughter up to the loft, with a bowl of chung. But the room was empty. The daughter found only a heaped quilt on the bed. Under the quilt she found a sphere of rainbow light, certain proof that her father had found enlightenment.

Later, Drukpa Kunley visited the house. He built a chorten at the place where the old man entered enlightenment, and later, Lama Chogyal constructed a temple there, which is now the Chimi Lhakhang you met at the beginning of this chapter.



Chimi Lhakhang

Lobesa

In modern Bhutan, Lobesa is a small village, quite near Chimi Lhakhang. It enjoys a vibrant collection of Drukpa Kunley stories and artifacts.

Before telling the stories, we would like to share what may be the quintessential photograph of the Drukpa Kunley tradition in modern Bhutan. Once you are outside the two or three main cities in Western Bhutan, you are in DK country. The traditions of Drukpa Kunley are vivid, as if DK were living in the 21st century.

No matter where we went in the rural parts of Western Bhutan, we were always able to find village elders who would drop everything to help us. Smiles would break out, and raucous laughter would follow. It never failed. This photograph shows our friend Sonam Jatso enjoying DK moments with Ap Lotey, our irrepressible village leader in Lobesa.



It’s hard to choose the best of all DK stories, but in many minds, the story of the Long Rong Demoness, who lurked near Lobesa, is at the top of the heap.

We’ll throw ourselves into the world of Long Rong. After DK built the stupa that ultimately morphed into Chimi Lhakhang, he made a brave decision. He would both subdue the Long Rong demoness and transform her into a perennial defender of the Buddhist tradition. In 15th century Bhutan, this mission was about as formidable as they got.

One might expect the Long Rong narrative to begin with a monumental

battle. Not so. Instead Kunley commenced the operation with a large-scale love affair. Step one for DK was to stroll along the river (in modern Bhutan, the Puna Tsang Chu) leading to Punakha. At once, the demoness charged up to Drukpa Kunley, leaping out of her pool in the river, and throwing up a huge cloud of spray.



Long Rong Demoness' Pool

It turns out that the Long Rong Demoness was many things: a monster, a beautiful woman, and a poet. In this iteration, she was a combination demoness and poet.

She opened with this bit of sprightly verse.

> *…The celebrated ascetic, Drukpa Kunley,*
>
> *A poverty stricken, wandering beggar,*
>
> *Talks nonsense and tells dirty stories.*
>
> *What is so marvelous about that?*
>
> *Don't expect homage or offering from me!*

Drukpa Kunley took a deep breath, and then delivered one of the best poems of his career.

> *Listen, you Water Serpent Demoness!…*
>
> *To this famous Drukpa Kunley.*
>
> *This indigent beggar, this vagrant.*
>
> *Has turned from desire in disgust*

And speaking whatever enters his mind,

Outward show is invested with virtue…

So. Long Rong Demoness, be content as Protectress!

You daughter of gods, serpents, devils, and demons.

Worthy consort, attractive and charming,

Insubstantial apparition, follow me!

Hold to the blissful path of Release

With your body, speech and mind

And gain Buddhahood in this lifetime,

And answer me righteously!

Now we have one of the great moments in Bhutanese folkloric tradition. The demoness shape-shifted into a beautiful, seductive woman. She brought chung to the lama in a crystal bowl. The stage was set for something special.

Hear me, Duty-Free Drukpa Kunley!…

I beg you to lead me to a blissful release.

Am I not a celestial ornament?

Above my waist my form is entrancing.

While below my waist in my Mandala of Bliss

My muscles are strong, and my upthrust is skillful…

For you, a Naljorpa who delights in love making,

And I, a serpent with fervent lust.

This meeting today augurs great joy.

Please stay this night with me here

And I'll offer you my body in devotion.

I beg you to grant me your godly favour.

So, DK and Long Rong commenced a blistering love affair. Ultimately, the demoness promised to become a protector of the Buddhist tradition. *Finally, to prepare her as a suitable candidate for instruction on higher spiritual union, he purified her through divine sexual play.*

Ah, but the heart can be a frail thing. Some time later, the demoness had a misunderstanding (over a rival woman, of course) that led to one of the epic Himalayan battles.

You may recall our mentioning a woman named Namkha Dronma, when we were telling the story of the cave at Tseluna Ney. She, through no fault of her own, was the underlying cause of a very serious lovers' quarrel between Drukpa Kunley and the Long Rong Demoness. We need to take you on a little detour now, to spend some time with Namkha Dronma, so you can understand how the larger story unfolded.

Namkha Dronma lived in a place called Pachung. In modern Bhutan, you can still see her house.



Namkha Dronma's House

After DK's torrid affair with the Long Rong Demoness had come to a graceful lull, Kunley wandered into a neighboring village called Pachung. Here, he found Namkha Dronma's house, and lay on the ground to take a rest. Namkha Dronma saw him from the window; somehow, she instantly knew that this raggedy man was the famous Drukpa Kunley.

> *… Drukpa Kunley, Master of the Truth*
>
> *Wherever you wander abroad*
>
> *You show impartial kindness;*
>
> *Stay with me here in my house*
>
> *And to this friendless virgin*
>
> *Give perfect understanding.*

DK was struck by her intelligence and good looks. Namkha Dronma served Kunley tea, booze and food. He had practically everything he

treasured, except for one thing.

Namkha Dronma, he said, you are beautiful. Aren't you married yet?

No, I'm still a virgin, she said. So Drukpa Kunley, showing great sensitivity, introduced her to sex slowly and carefully. All in all, a soulful experience for both of them. DK stayed with Namkha Dronma several days, giving her Buddhist teachings. And then he resumed his itinerant ways.

Later, DK found himself missing the company of Namkha Dronma. He decided to go back to her home in Pachung, but made the grievous mistake of walking through the territory of the Long Rong Demoness. The demoness was not born yesterday. She knew perfectly well that DK was on the way to visit one of his girlfriends. In a jealous rage, she threw away her Buddhist vows and mounted an attack. *He found her straddling the valley with her breasts flying in the wind, her hair trailing on the ground, and her organ gaping between her thighs*.

Kunley knew this was a defining moment. *The lama took hold of the shaft of his Thunderbolt with his right hand and raised it aloft, and with his left hand he grasped the Demoness' breasts.*



Suddenly, sensing she was beaten, the demoness turned and fled at top speed, merging herself into an enormous boulder. DK stuck the Flaming Thunderbolt into the rock and shouted:

Long Rong Demoness, Contented Protectress of Truth!

Never harm other living beings!

If in the future you wish mischief on anyone

I will destroy you as I destroy this rock!

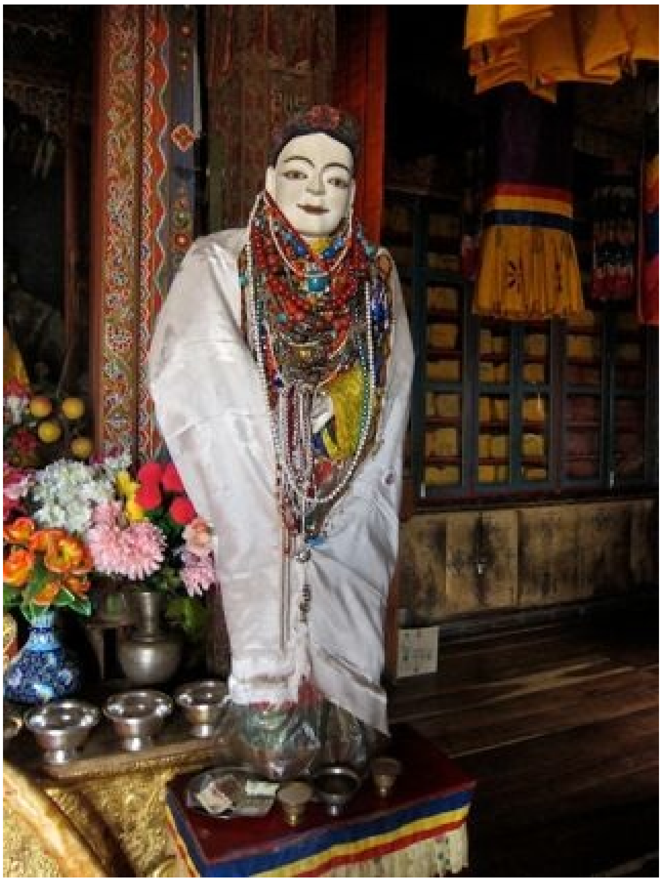
With a blast, the rock flew into pieces. At that moment, all that was left of the demoness was a loud voice, which confessed she had been jealous and vengeful and promised to behave in the future. Then the demoness herself appeared in the center of the river, looking sad and repentant. She took a yak horn full of rice chung and offered it to the

Lama gracefully, vowing never to harm living beings. Drukpa Kunley forgave the demoness and renamed her Happy Encounter.

In modern Bhutan, you can still still a piece of the rock that exploded. And the demoness herself has become an important figure to the local people, named Aum Choekim.



Remnant of the Long Rong Rock



Statue of Aum Choekim

The Lobesa area is loaded with interesting DK artifacts; a walk along the river reveals one after the other. We don't know exactly how they fit into the Long Rong stories you have just read, but there is no doubt about their importance to the local people. Here is a photo gallery of just a few of them.



Rock where DK rested his Flaming Thunderbolt



Rock where DK hid from the Long Rong Demoness



Drukpa Kunley's cooking pot

Jilli Gang

There is, to the north of Lobesa, an area called Jilli Gang, which we privately think of as the place of jokes. You know by now that Drukpa Kunley was a complex person, ranging from sweet to ferocious. But at the heart of it all, we think of him as primarily an outrageous lama with a towering sense of humor. In Jilli Gang, DK was in peak form.

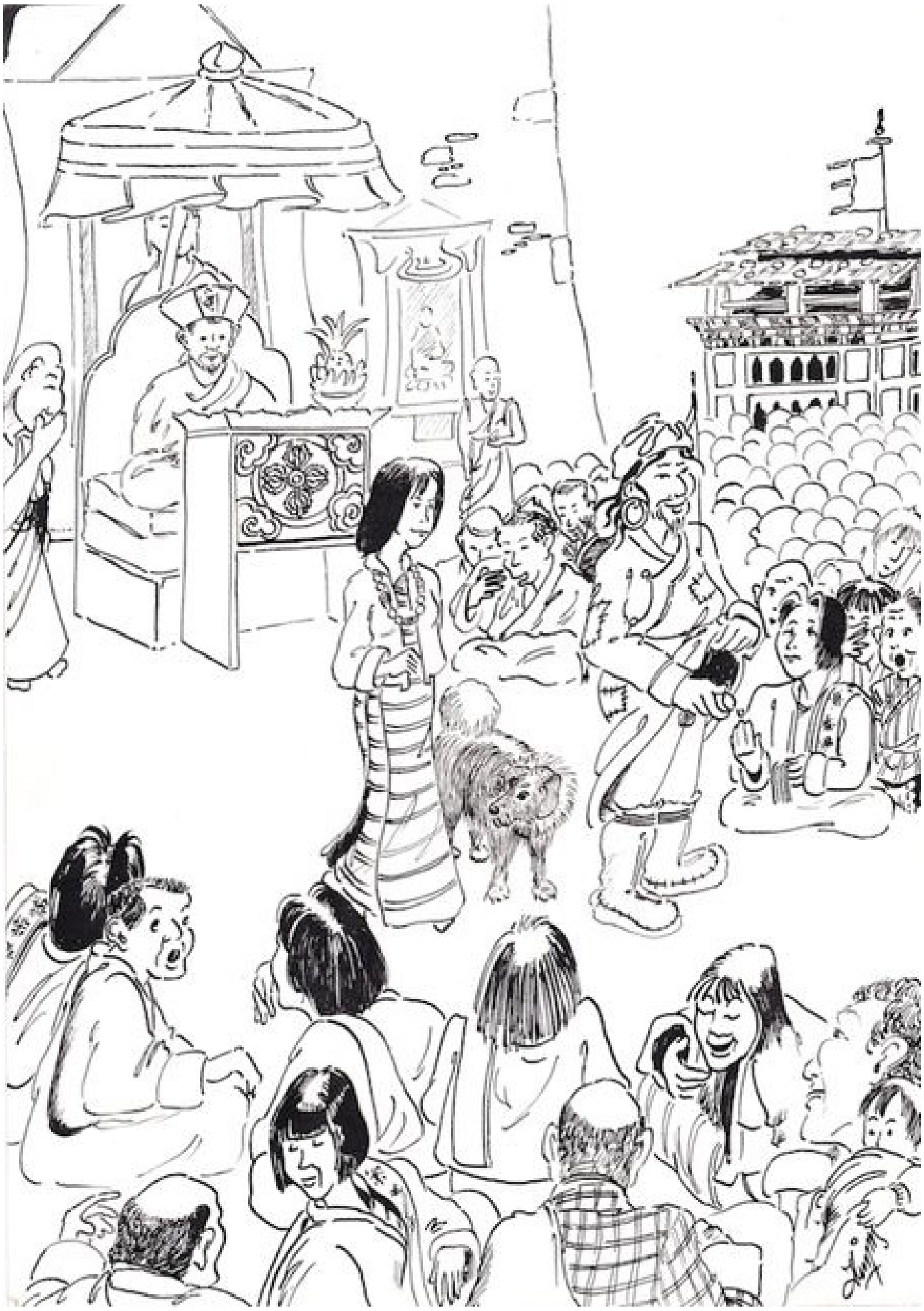
Of course, a good joke often needs a suitable butt. You will recall Lama Chogyal, to whom you were introduced in the chapter on Tibet. As a stiff, rule-bound representative of institutional Buddhism, he was the ideal target for DK’s irreverent antics. We encounter Chogyal over and over in Jilli Gang, serving his thankless task as Kunley’s fall guy.

Actually, it was Lama Chogyal who inadvertently gave Jilli Gang its name. There is a hole in the rocks in which Chogyal placed a cat (reason unknown). The cat disappeared, but then emerged from the bottom of the mountain. Jilli Gang means cat hill.

We’ll start with a story that probably receives the award in this book for zany humor. To get the full idea, we need to introduce you to an artifact of Buddhist practice called the flask of ambrosia. It is a vessel filled with nectar, which is thought to convey the empowerment of a deity. At the beginning of our story, Lama Chogyal was consecrating the flask, before the liquid had been put into it.

Up strode Drukpa Kunley. He was in fine fettle, decked out with his bow and arrows, and escorting Lady Adzom, one of his flashier girlfriends. *The Flask of Ambrosia is not needed today, he told the abbot, who was in the process of consecrating the vessel. I will provide the nectar myself. Each of you close your eyes and stretch out your hands to receive it.*

Then, holding his penis in his right hand, he passed a drop of urine into each of the outstretched hands.



This may surprise you, but some of the crowd were thrilled with DK's version of nectar. They drank it down devotedly, finding it to be sweet. Others put a bad look on their faces, spit it out, and wiped their hands. *Those who drank with reverence gained power and realization, while those who spat it out gained only a run of bad luck.*

Kunley left the ceremony and wandered into the market. Lady Adzom was the ideal foil for his antics. He laughed and played, squeezed Adzom's breasts, and did whatever carefree thing came into this mind. As usual, the crowd grumbled about the mad pervert, and as usual, Kunley responded with his spirited, raunchy verses.

That night a thousand Fire Spirits decided to hold a convention on a nearby mountain. Drukpa Kunley sensed that a crowd of unsavory characters was in the neighborhood. He grabbed a firebrand out of his

campfire and, with a mighty fling, threw the blazing limb right into their middle. Instantly, hundreds of the Fire Spirits were consumed by flames, and the smell of burned flesh spread through the valley.

The next morning Lama Chogyal noticed the smell (although he thought it was roast pork). He accosted DK. Why is a Buddhist lama like you harming other sentient beings? Not to worry, said Kunley. By way of explanation, DK sang a nice little song, full of the usual eyebrow-raising material. Here is a sample.

Peering up a house's eves,

A fungus is clinging to a beam—

Even a violent wind will not loosen it.

Peering up a long leg,

A clit is cleaning to a beaver—

Even an arrogant penis will not loosen it.

By midday, Lama Chogyal had begun an initiation rite, accompanied by a tedious lecture from his high throne. This was another fruitful setting for a Kunley prank. First, DK caused the crowd to hear the barking of a dog in the distance. Instantly, the crowd became uneasy. They were convinced that evil men were chasing a deer in the woods, about to violate the Buddhist prohibition against killing sentient beings.

At that moment, a very tired deer staggered into view and dropped at Lama Chogyal's feet. The crowd's opinion of Lama Chogyal began to soften. A truly holy man, they thought, giving refuge to this helpless creature.

Well, that opened the door to step two of DK's little joke. He burst into the marketplace, his bow and arrow at the ready. *What's the matter, deer? he said. What are you doing here when you should be up and running?* To everyone's astonishment, he shot the deer, his arrow passing through the deer's body.



The crowd, as always, began to grumble. This is a cruel joke, indeed. But Kunley ignored them. He skinned the animal, cut off its head, and separated the rest into pieces. Then Drukpa Kunley built a fire, cooked the meat, and gave a sample to each person.

Step three was the highlight. After the crowd had enjoyed a pleasant, unexpected lunch, DK put the bones in a pile and snapped his fingers. The bones instantly shape-shifted into a healthy, rambunctious deer, which ran into the woods.

We'll leave Jilli Gang with a story from the oral tradition, which requires a one-word glossary. Many Buddhist rituals incorporate elaborate, colorful ritual cakes, known as torma. They use the normal ingredients of cakes the world around, such as flour, butter and salt, and are usually heavy on the butter and light on the flour. Torma are a key part of the upcoming

story.

A family in a nearby village decided that it needed to undertake a serious ritual in the family house. They arranged for Lama Chogyal to supervise.

For ceremonies of this magnitude, it is normal for a someone to spend the entire preceding day preparing the torma. The family asked Chogyal who he would recommend—surprisingly he came up Kunley’s name. Foolish man!

The family collected all the ingredients for torma, and Drukpa Kunley arrived right on time, the morning before ceremony day. DK disappeared into the kitchen and the family could hear a great clattering of pots and pans. Unable to restrain their curiosity, they peeked into the kitchen. To their consternation, they saw Kunley gobbling down great quantities of the torma dough, until he had consumed the whole thing. It was a disaster in the making.

DK charged into the altar room, with all the appearance of a man who was about to install torma on the various niches of the altar. Again, the family was overpowered by curiosity. They stole a cautious glimpse in the altar room, and were rattled to discover DK clambering to the highest level of the altar. Here, he carefully placed an impressively large turd. He worked his way to the lower levels of the altar, positioning smaller turds along the way. These, it appears, were all that was left of the quantities of torma dough consumed by Kunley several hours before.

Of course, the family was mortified. Why an earth did Lama Chogyal send them this madman, who had ruined the most important ceremony of the year? And then Chogyal himself arrived, only to hear groans and lamentations from the family. In light of all the ridicule the Lama had suffered at the hands of Drukpa Kunley, it would have been natural for him to condemn Kunley. Instead, he showed an unexpectedly sanguine side to his personality. Please be calm, he said. Drukpa Kunley is a great sage, and somehow good will come of this.

One final time, the group peered into the altar room. DK had taken the vase of holy water and had begun to sprinkle the altar. As the drops of water fell, each turd transformed itself into a torma. When he was finished, the altar room glowed with the most glorious torma they had ever seen. Kunley turned, jumped through the window, and disappeared. The family felt sad that they had no chance to apologize for their negative feelings.

Po Chu

We move north now, to the valley of the Po River. Like so many other parts of Bhutan, this is a mystically handsome place. You can sense Drukpa Kunley in the geography.

At the beginning of his time in the Po Chu Valley, DK met a couple on the trail. He opened with his usual question. Do you have any booze, he asked.

It turns out that they had quite a lot. They took Kunley home, and he was a happy man. Then they began to tell him their life story. They had produced five sons The first four had all died at the age of three. The fifth was approaching his third birthday, and his parents were terrified that they would lose him too. Please help us, they said.

So Kunley took the boy in his lap and asked for a rope. The parents found a large rope made of yak hair. DK tied the rope firmly around the boy and suddenly started dragging him—out of the house, though the village, and down to the river. Then Drukpa Kunley whirled the boy around and around, and, with a mighty heave, launched him into the river. The parents hysterically begged the lama to stop torturing their son.



But the parents didn't realize that the minute DK laid hands on their son, he knew that this small creature was not a human at all, but was a demon in disguise. Furthermore, Kunley had discovered that their four previous sons had also been demons. It was not humans who had died at the age of three, it was demons.

Watch what happens, he said the the parents, as their little boy disappeared beneath the surface of the Po Chu. Under water, the demon shape-shifted from a boy to a black dog, which then swam to the side of the river. Kunley instantly understood that the dog was actually the demon. DK chased the dog/demon along the river, until the two of them reached a large rock. The demon merged into the rock, thinking he was safe. Not so. Kunley took his Flaming Thunderbolt in hand, thrust it into the rock with a satisfying crunch, and exterminated the demon.



Dog Demon rock, with Flaming Thunderbolt hole

After the fireworks had come to an end, Kunley consulted with the parents. Try again, he urged. In fact, couple as much as you can.

So, they did. And in a short time they had another son, this time a real one. It is said that this little part of Bhutan has been a great place for producing sons ever since.

After wandering a bit more in the Po Chu Valley, Drukpa Kunley had several smaller-scale adventures in which his antics definitely went awry. It started innocently enough.

DK was sitting quietly by the trail, playing a game called hema (which is played on the flat surface of a rock). It was really quite engrossing, but Kunley realized that the day was passing by, and soon he would run out of time. So he caught the sun and froze its position in the sky. Perfect—plenty of time for leisurely game playing.



DK's game rock

However, Drukpa Kunley then realized that he was getting hungry. Normally, in Kunley's charmed life, someone would come along and offer him booze, food, and if he were lucky that day, an opportunity for love. However, the local villagers were an irascible lot—no-one offered a thing.

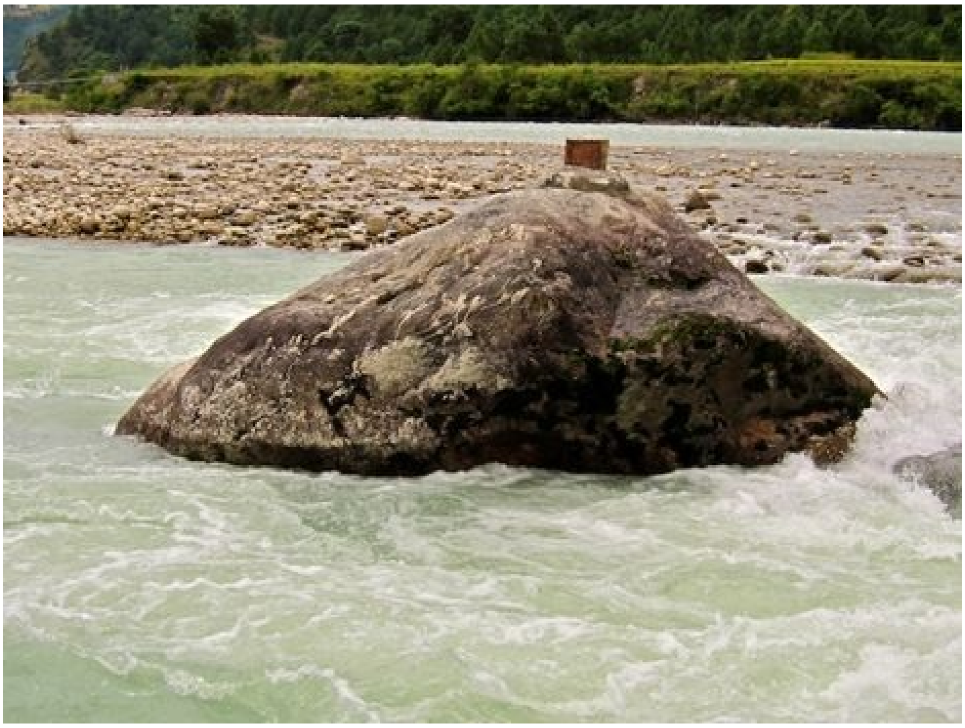
Notwithstanding his increasingly dim view of the locals, DK gave some good advice to two women. Get your grain under shelter, he said, because soon it will grow dark and start to rain. He knew this, of course, because he was still holding onto the sun. As soon as he let go, the dark would rush in and rain would begin.

But the women ignored this strange, rag-tag lama. Then it all happened as predicted. Kunley let go of the sun, it got dark all of a sudden, the rain poured down, and the grain was ruined. When the men came in from the fields, they saw the soggy grain and got furious at their wives, who promptly blamed DK. There was a crazy lama here, they said, who proclaimed inauspicious things about the sun and rain. This mess is entirely his fault.

At that moment, the men caught sight of Drukpa Kunley. They charged, with their knives flailing! DK ran for his life, first imprinting his foot on a large white boulder, and then taking refuge on a rock in the middle of the river. For a change, our hero was nearly the victim, not the victor. All because he held onto the sun.



Po Chu footprint rock



Po Chu hiding rock

Our next story from Po Chu could be described as light-hearted good works. It all started when Drukpa Kunley paid a visit to the home of Apa Tashi and Ama Nanga Lhama. It was infatuation at first sight, resulting in the couple begging DK to marry their daughter. *If I'm going to marry your daughter I need chung*, said DK. It turned out that they were expert brewers of chung—Kunley was greatly impressed, and casually converted the grain from which the chung had been made into gold.



The chung pot

While he was lounging around, Kunley noticed that one of the pillars supporting the house had become crooked. He saw Apa getting ready to chop down a tree, to shape a new pillar. *I am used to erecting pillars* , said DK, in one of his better plays on words. Instantly, he made the old pillar straight and new.



The straightened pillar

One day Drukpa Kunley was sauntering up the valley when he noticed three children fishing in the river. Instantly, DK was on the alert, because he knew that a voracious demon lived upstream. Kunley ran down to the river. Using his normal consumption-oriented method of introduction, he asked the children if they could give him a fish to eat.

It turned out that these children were rude. Go catch a fish yourself, they said. You have nothing better to do. They were also lucky, because DK decided to ignore their intemperate behavior.

Drukpa Kunley jumped into the river and pretended to fish. Wouldn't you know it. The demon came rushing down the valley, intending to have a three-kid lunch. The demon slid into the water, turned himself into a large fish, and headed straight for the children. Kunley came to the rescue.

> *You serpent-demon! Even if you turn yourself into a giant yoni ogre [a pussy] you won't scare me, he shouted at it. And catching it with his hand he dashed it upon a rock, leaving an imprint that can still be seen today.*



The Po Chu Fish Rock

These days in modern Bhutan, you can see both the fish rock, and also a small cave-temple on the right side. According to the local people, DK left some hidden teachings in the fish rock (in Tibetan Buddhist tradition, these are called terma). These are the only terma we encountered in

Bhutan attributed to Kunley.



The Fish Rock Temple

The following story from Po Chu Valley shows Drukpa Kunley's versatility. In addition to mounting ferocious battles against monsters, DK was also capable of intimate, small-scale missions of mercy. One day, Kunley found himself in the area of Chawa Thang. There, in the middle of rice fields, he encountered a woman engaged in the endless task of guarding her fields against birds. DK felt sorry for her. If you get me some food, said Kunley, I'll guard your field. While the woman was gone, DK collected all the birds in the area and put them inside a huge rock. Even today, you can hear the birds chirping from within the rock, and the local people have the amazing luxury of never needing to guard their fields against birds.



The huge rock, full of birds, at Chawa Thang



Our friend, Sonam Jatso, listening to the birds

By now, you will have noticed how rocks are at the heart of the DK story. Kunley used rocks of every size for a bewildering array of purposes. We find them storing birds, crushing fish demons, imprisoning monsters, and resting the Flaming Thunderbolt. It makes sense, when you consider that Drukpa Kunley led a life of almost perfect detachment from material things. In fact, his list of possessions occupies just four lines:

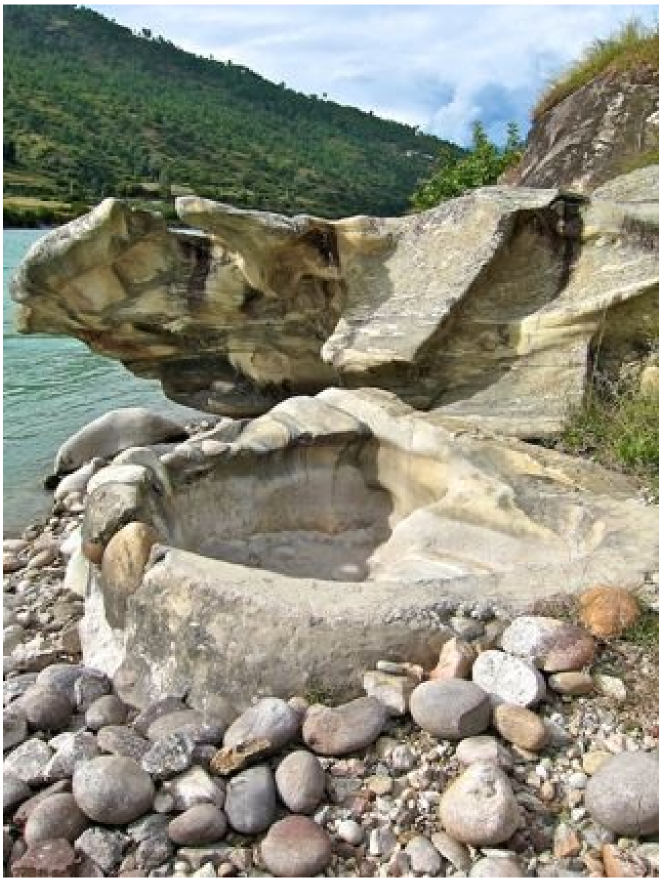
• The clothing on his back;

• His bow;

• His arrows, and

• His dog.

With such a perfectly streamlined style of life, Drukpa Kunley made do. Often, when a job needed to be done, Kunley enlisted a rock. Here, for example, is a rock along the Po river that he converted into his bathtub.



Sha

Sha will be the eastern-most place we reach in our journey with Drukpa Kunley. Although DK's travels took him to many remarkable parts of Bhutan, we need to put Sha on the honor roll of beautiful places. Bhutanese often refer to this valley as the hanging gardens of Sha, because of the almost perfect combination of natural topography and gorgeously etched terraces.

We begin with a story close to the hearts of all Bhutanese. According to tradition, while he was visiting Sha, Drukpa Kunley invented the takin, which became the national animal of Bhutan.

What is a takin, you will probably ask. The takin is a strange creature almost unknown to people outside the Himalayas. Face to face, it looks like a bizarre combination of various four-footed animals. The famous biologist, George Schaller, called the takin a bee-stung moose.

Our story begins in the village of Samtengang. As you know, many Drukpa Kunley adventures are private affairs, with just DK and a few local people. This case was different. A group of Kunley admirers spread the word—Drukpa Kunley is in town! A huge crowd (well, huge for Bhutan) gathered, eager to watch DK perform one of his trademark outlandish miracles.

Naturally, DK was hungry. So the organizers served him a goat's head and a carcass of beef. Kunley dove in, and soon ate the whole thing. Then came the momentous inspiration. Drukpa Kunley took the goat's head and stuck it on the cow's skeleton. *You have no flesh on your bones, he said to the animal. Go up on the mountain and graze! He snapped his fingers and the beast arose and ran up the valley, to the astonishment of all those present.*

Thus, we have the takin.



Kunley wandered this way and that in Sha, and after awhile found himself in the village of Kungzangling. DK gave some teachings there, although the main event was a confrontation with a grim-looking creature known as the nine-goiter monster.



DK gave his teachings from this throne

The monster story unfolded as follows. The village people had been tormented a long time by a monster whose main physical attribute was nine nasty goiters. They knew that Drukpa Kunley was in town and was a renowned slayer of demons. So they set a little trap.

When Kunley asked where he might find a house to spend the night, the villagers delivered a bald-faced lie. There is no room in our houses, they said, so you will need to sleep in those ruins. They knew that the monster was fond of the ruins himself, and they reckoned that they had created an almost certain confrontation.



View from Kungzangling, with the ruins in the distance

What the villagers didn't know was that DK had gotten inside information on the monster, and he realized that he would very likely have a monster-experience that very night. Sure enough, the monster appeared and was enraged to find this lama trespassing in his territory.

A tremendous battle unfolded, coming to a peak when DK whacked the monster on its head, and then on his rear end with the Flaming Thunderbolt. In one of the better scenes in Kunley's demon-subduing career, the monster burst into flames and plunged over the side of the cliff. According to tradition, even today you can smell scorched flesh near the cliff.



Although the 15th century villagers in Kungzangling were a churlish lot, it turns out that the women of Sha may have been the best poets in all of Bhutan. Kunley's next adventure proved the point.

After he had rested from his epic battle, DK looked across the valley at the town of Chung Sekha, which is exactly opposite Kungzangling. There, next to a huge cypress tree, was a wondrous sight. A woman of startling beauty, Mistress Gyaldzom, was dancing and swinging her hips.



The cypress tree in Chung Sekha

Drukpa Kunley was enraptured, and sang this song.

Looking out from Shar Kungzangling
I see the Dakini of Khyung Sekha
Swinging and swaying like a goddess.
She must be Mistress Gyaldzom!
Today when the sun reaches its zenith
The Duty-Free Kunley will visit you.
Fill a yak horn full of the essence of chung
And we'll tell stories and enjoy love together.

That afternoon, DK made the crossing from Kungzangling to Chung Sekha. He reached Mistress Gyaldzom's house and found that she was preparing to fetch water. DK, being DK, couldn't resist some raunchy talk. *You don't need to fetch water, said the Lama. We'll make it run from your own spring.* They made love, and afterwards, the Mistress begged him to stay. Again, Kunley had a spicy, non-sequitur response. *I cannot stay here, he replied. But because your secret place is hairless, I'll return to you for nine days some time in the future. I'll return for another nine days because it is dry. And I'll return for another nine days because your body has no odour. But now I must leave.*

After a bit more back and forth, both of them burst into verse. These are among DK's best love songs. Gyaldzom began:

O Drukpa Kunley! Wandering Naljorpa!

Listen to the song of this maiden Byaldzom

The mountain meadows turn white in winter

But Crazy Kunley is whiter (happier);

The meadows turn from white to green and green to white

But Kunley, Master of Truth, stays ever white.

The sharp-eyed vulture soaring high

Has no power in its wings,

So when the storm of karma blows

Perforce it must follow the wind.

I, Mistress Gyaldzom of Khyung Sekha,

Powerless to determine my fate,

Destined to wait sadly at home,

Eventually found my true consort—

But this transient meeting leaves me sad.

And Drukpa Kunley replied with this song.

Listen, Mistress Gyaldzom of Khyung Sekha!

Listen to Kunley's song!

Fire heats icy glacial waters

But Gyaldzom's heart heats faster.

The sun heats water in crevices in the rock

But Gyaldzom's heart heats faster.

Exertion heats juices of the secret spring

But Gyaldzom's heart heats faster.

You may bubble and boil

And I will stay white and happy!

Kunley travelled on, reaching the village of Galeykha. It didn't take him long to take up with another gifted poet of Sha, Sharmo Kunzang.



The hanging gardens of Sha, Galeykha in the background

Sharmo Kungzang sang this touching song.

Listen to this sad girl's song

I feel like the misused wood of a cellar doorstep

Held firmly in place by the door-posts,

Abused by trampling dogs and swine.

Don't leave me here! Take me to Ralung in Upper Tsang

And make me part of the temple, so I may gain Buddhahood.

I feel like the ill-treated iron on the blacksmith's anvil

Caught by pliers and pinchers, unable to move,

Beaten by the hammer at the blacksmith's whim.

Don't leave me here! Take me to Ralung in Upper Tsang

And make me part of the temple, so I may gain Buddhahood.

I miserable Sharmo Kunzang, abused and ill-treated,

Have such love for my parents that I am constrained to remain,

But my cruel husband makes my life unbearable.

Don't leave me here! Take me to Ralung in Upper Tsang

And make me part of the temple, so I may gain Buddhahood.

Kunley replies with some stalwart poetry of his own.

Listen to me, Kungzang of Sharmo!

While crossing the sky, the sun shines on all four continents,

And wandering Kunley needs no traveling companion.

The most fortunate tree grows tall in inaccessible southern jungles,

Where the axe of the callous woodman cannot touch it.

Better to be a spreading tree than a temple door-post,

and the cellar door-step can be made of stone.

The most fortunate iron finds the anvil of the blacksmith,

But better a staff or a begging bowl for you than a temple door.

You need not suffer on the sweating, scorched

blacksmith's anvil,

When wood and stone can replace the blacksmith's iron.

You, fortunate girl, born in Gyengling Nyishar,

Need not bear the beating of your ox-like husband.

But rather than become my lover, go into meditation.

And let your sister-in-law replace you as your parents' servant.

Apparently, DK's words worked. The girl went to Paro and spent three years in meditation. With her devoted work and Kunley's grace, she achieved enlightenment.

We end this book with a reflection on the last place Drukpa Kunley visited in Sha. DK encountered a girl, Gokye Palmo, near an imposing fortress known as the Wache Dzong. Of course, he had a spirited affair with her, but that is not the point of this closing thought. Had you and we been there in the 15th century, the Wache Dzong would have looked like an impregnable and perennial structure. But in the six centuries that have passed since then, the dzong has melted away. Just a few walls, surrounded by forest, remain today. However, the stories of Drukpa Kunley, and, above, the principles they illustrate, remain as bright and compelling as ever.



The Wache Dzong, returning to earth

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